THE MERSHON CENTER at The Ohio State University

Klaus Schwabe

Klaus Schwabe
Historisches Institut
University of Technology, Aachen

"Germany and the United States, From the Marshall Plan to the Iraq War: A Transatlantic Dialogue Then and Now"

Monday, April 17, 2006
12 p.m.
Mershon Center
Room 120

This lecture is open to the public. Lunch will be served to invited students and faculty who RSVP to Viki Jones no later than Thursday, April 13, 2006.

Klaus Schwabe, born in 1932, is professor emeritus at the Historisches Institut of the University of Technology at Aachen, Germany, where he held the chair of contemporary history between 1980 and 1997. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Freiburg. From 1972 until 1980 he was professor of modern history at the University of Frankfurt.

Among Schwabe's major publications are his book *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking 1918-19* (1985); *The Beginnings of the Schuman Plan* (1988), which he edited and to which he contributed; a three-language documentary volume of the Paris Peace Conference (*Quellen zum Friedensschluß von Versailles*, 1997); and, most recently, the monograph *Weltmacht und Weltordnung. Amerikanische Außenpolitik von 1898 bis zur Gegenwart* (2006), an account of America 's diplomacy in the 20th century.

Schwabe served as guest professor at The Ohio State University and Georgetown University , as well as at the Sorbonne and the University of Louvain-la-Neuve, and was a research fellow at Princeton University and the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo. He is co-editor of the *Journal of European Integration History*.

The relationship between Germany and the United States has undergone many changes in the last century. For Klaus Schwabe, who has experienced these changes first-hand as a German and a frequent visitor to the United States, German-American relations in the 20 th century divide into three distinct periods. Schwabe described these periods as three images impressed upon him through his experiences.

Schwabe's first image of U.S.-German relations came from growing up in West Berlin just after World War II. In order to rebuild, Germany needed American assistance, and the United States did not hesitate to provide it. Schwabe described how American cars and American goods in West Berlin connoted prosperity and progress. After the Americans prevailed over the Soviets in the 1948 blockade of Berlin, Schwabe said, Germans had an even more positive impression of the United States . In the aftermath of World War II, Germans needed an alternative national identity and political model to the legacy of Hitler, and many Germans looked for this in the United States.

Schwabe first visited the United States in 1952-53 through a student exchange program, and he said that this visit made his

image of the country more complex. He was surprised to see American beggars who seemed to have missed their opportunities to partake of the American dream. Nonetheless, Schwabe said, most Germans remained highly optimistic about their country's relationship with the United States. This optimism was reinforced by the United States' reconciliation with other European countries in the 1950s and '60s, and by U.S. support of the Schumann Plan and the emergence of the European Union.

The second period or image developed with the onset of the United States ' involvement in Vietnam. Schwabe said that while he defended the United States, most Germans had a growing antagonism toward American foreign policy. Student uprisings and protests in 1968 (the so-called "1968ers") decried the Vietnam War, calling it a war by the rich on the poor. This second period was broken only briefly by the United States' positive involvement with the end of the Cold War. While German-American relations were positive for a short period after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the first Gulf War renewed German dissatisfaction over American foreign policy.

Schwabe described the current, third, image as a historical composite of the earlier two. While on the one hand, many Germans view the United States as an aspiring imperial power, the Clinton administration's activities in the Balkans were highly commended in Germany, and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 prompted strong sympathy for America .

The current Iraq war, however, has provoked three strands of protest, Schwabe said. First, the German left has identified itself with the developing world, including Iraq. This strand of protest sees the United States as a threat to multiculturalism. Second, some Germans – predominantly the older generation – recall the devastating wars between the two countries. Third, many Germans contrast the perceived virtue of American foreign policy earlier in the 20 th century – e.g. the Marshall Plan – with present-day foreign policy, which is perceived as militant.

Schwabe concluded by juxtaposing these three images with a contemporary realist assessment of German-American relations. While Germany no longer needs to kowtow to American foreign policy for security reasons, as was necessary during the Cold War, Schwabe claimed that numerous arguments remain for why the two countries should nurture a positive relationship.

Among these reasons are America's role as one of the best markets for German goods, German interests in non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the fact that Eastern Europe, specifically Russia, remains a volatile region. Schwabe called this realist depiction of German-American relations an "enlightened" version of German interests, and he endorsed strong ties between the two countries.